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WILFULNESS
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



By Lady Herbert.



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WILFULNESS.

AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

A Tale

*EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF A SISTER OF
MERCY BY*

LADY HERBERT.

And Jesus went down with His parents, and came to Nazareth, *and was
subject to them.* St. Luke ii. 51.

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TO
THE REVEREND MOTHER SUPERIOR

OF THE

Convent of Our Lady of Mercy,

CALLED 'ST. EDWARD'S,' IN BLANDFORD SQUARE,

ON THE OCCASION OF HER HALF JUBILEE AS SUPERIOR (ON THE
25TH OF NOVEMBER 1872), THIS SIMPLE RECORD OF ONE
OF THE MANY DEEDS OF CHARITY PERFORMED BY TWO OF
THE SISTERS OF HER COMMUNITY, IS AFFECTIONATELY DE-
DICATED BY

MARY ELIZABETH HERBERT.

Wilfulness and its Consequences.

To love God without at the same time loving our neighbour is impossible.

‘This commandment we have from God; that he who loveth God, love also his brother’ (1 John iv. 21).

But holy Charity,—‘the beautiful daughter of God’—being banished from the world by the greater part of mankind, seeks an asylum in the hearts of those who have voluntarily relinquished the world, with all its joys and pleasures, to devote themselves to the care of the sick, the suffering, the poor, and the little ones of Christ’s flock. Almost innumerable are the Orders of Charity which have emanated from the bosom of our holy Mother, the Church. But at this moment we will speak only of one,

6 *Wilfulness and its Consequences.*

—that of the Sisters of Mercy, whose religious houses are scattered broadcast over England and Ireland, and whose foundress has only a few years ago passed away from among us to receive her eternal reward. Before relating the simple story which will form the subject of this little book, I will give a rapid sketch of the life of this holy servant of God, mainly drawn from a pamphlet published by Messrs. Burns & Oates in 1866, entitled *The First Sister of Mercy*.

Catharine M'Auley, the foundress of this Order, was born in 1778. She was the daughter of a most excellent father—a man given with all his heart to charity and piety; one of a class of laymen to be found here and there in those days in Ireland, who were the providential instruments of keeping alive the faith in many souls besides their own. Notwithstanding the social disadvantages which then, to a far greater extent than at present, weighed upon all Catholic gentlemen who openly and zealously exerted themselves for religion, he was not only remarkable for his charities, but also for his endeavours to supply to some extent the dearth of priests in his part of the country, by assembling the poor of his neighbourhood from time to time, and giving them the best instruction he could. This excellent man, whose spirit was inherited by his daughter Catharine, died while she was quite a child, leaving two other children—another daughter and an infant son—to the care of his widow, a person by no

means equal to him in her devotion to her religion. She removed to Dublin, and allowed Protestant influences to be brought to bear on the children, which ended in the disturbance of the faith of the two younger. Catharine, however, persevered; and she used to attribute the grace which enabled her to do so to the Sacrament of Confirmation, for which she made a devout and fervent preparation. Her own life was afterwards continually coming back to her in the needs of those who were the objects of her work of mercy; and she has left her own diligent care in preparing children for Confirmation as a special legacy to the sisters of her Order. She grew up a bright, affectionate, winning girl; with a special gift of comforting and cheering others, strong impulses to piety, a love of reading, and a great dislike for the usual amusements and enjoyments of young people like herself. She was about half-way through her teens when her mother died. The children fell into the hands of a Protestant friend, who brought them up well in other respects, but without the slightest attention to the religion to which they belonged. Those were days too in which Protestant families spent their conversation in nothing more commonly than in abuse of the Catholic Church. The boy—Catharine's brother—became a Protestant; her sister afterwards married a Protestant, and conformed to his religion. Catharine herself, unable to answer the statements and objections urged upon her without mercy, was in great trouble of mind; but she fell in the way of a man of much eminence in those days—Dr. Beytagh—who instructed and consoled her, lent her good books, and thus helped her to surmount the trial. She

began again to listen to her impulses to devotion, though she was under so many restrictions in her new home as to make the frequentation of the Sacraments difficult to her. These restrictions, however, were but little in comparison to the disadvantages under which she was soon placed in this respect. At eighteen she was adopted, as their daughter, by a wealthy Protestant couple, who had no children of their own, and their house in the country, at a distance from any Catholic church, became from that time her home.

Mr. and Mrs. O'Callaghan of Coolock House, who had thus taken Catharine for their child, gave her full liberty in everything but her religion. But she used her new position for the benefit of the poor. She went into society as much as she was obliged, and no more; but for miles round she was known as the angel of comfort and relief to the sick and needy. She seems to have been often quite unable to get to Mass herself. The church was too far for her to walk, and her friends would not send her in their carriage. She could not even keep a crucifix or a pious picture; but she knelt with a Catholic servant before the cross made by the partitions of the doors, and found the holy emblem in the branches of the trees. She managed to practise some mortifications, especially that which she continued all her life—to eat and drink nothing from Holy Thursday till Easter-eve. She prayed very much; and the poor repaid her charities by fervent prayers; for they knew her faith, and the difficulties she had in practising what it required. Things went on in this way for some time—we are not told how long—then she was able to get to the Sacraments

secretly, during some shopping visits to Dublin ; and by the advice of her confessor, she took courage to petition for greater religious liberty, which Mr. and Mrs. O'Callaghan did not refuse.

She was, in fact, to be the means of their conversion. Her character was perfectly radiant with the light of grace and faith, though she said nothing, and her influence gained an ascendancy of which they were unconscious. Mrs. O'Callaghan fell ill, and lingered long. Then Catharine was able to win her to consider the Catholic faith, which she had already pressed on her in daily life by the most efficacious of all arguments—a saintly example. The fear of displeasing her husband was the last hindrance to be overcome. She thought, moreover, that her conversion would induce him at once to dismiss Catharine from his home. Catharine implored her not to hesitate on her account, and managed to introduce a priest while Mr. O'Callaghan was absent. Mrs. O'Callaghan died almost immediately after her reconciliation to the Church.

Catharine's position was not changed by the death of her adopted mother. Mr. O'Callaghan trusted her entirely; and she was now able to resume her active works of mercy among the poor. The experience she thus acquired was the source from which she afterwards drew largely; and she then composed the substance of what is still the manual used by the Sisters of Mercy in their visits to the sick. After some time, Mr. O'Callaghan came to be confined to the house, and at last to his bed. This was the opportunity for which Catharine had so long prayed. She tended him with the utmost sweetness and affection, speaking to

him of common religious subjects without mentioning matters of controversy. One morning she knelt by his bedside and burst into tears. She had been told by the physician that his state was extremely uncertain; and her confessor had exhorted her not to let another day pass without urging on Mr. O'Callaghan the danger of his soul. She was unable to speak till he asked her to tell him whether he was in danger of death. She told him the truth; and then spoke of religion. At last he consented to receive the visit of the priest, who, after a short time, received him into the Catholic Church. His death left Catharine the sole heiress of a large property, at the age, as we have said, of forty-four.

The circumstances of her life had cut her off from any large circle of Catholic acquaintance. Her chief adviser was the good priest, Mr. Armstrong, who had reconciled Mr. O'Callaghan on his deathbed. Catharine looked upon the fortune of which she was now the possessor as a trust placed in her hands by Providence; and she determined to spend it entirely in the service of God and of the poor. Her own experience suggested the kind of misery which it should be devoted to relieve. Ignorant children, in danger of being badly brought up, or losing their father; servants out of place; persons of good character without a home; and the sick and dying, in need of comfort and spiritual assistance—these she had already frequently come across, and desired to help more than had then been in her power. One day, at a later time than this, she had seen an orphan child turned out of one of the cellars in which the poorest of the poor live;

its parents had lately died, and the cellar had been let to another family. From that time dated her devotion to the relief of orphans—taken up as it has so nobly been by her spiritual children. The Houses of Refuge had their origin in her mind in a sadder tale. Before the death of Mr. O'Callaghan, she met with a foolish girl of good character whose imprudence had exposed her to great danger of ruin. She sought at once to place her in the established House of Refuge in Dublin; but it was one of those institutions governed by boards and committees; and the poor girl was lost before the regular machinery for admitting her could be put in motion. Her first idea as to the use of her fortune was to provide some permanent establishment for such cases as hers, and for the education of children. She bought, at a very high price, the ground on which the present Convent in Baggot-street stands; and the first stone of her building was laid in July 1824. It was more than a year and a half after the death of Mr. O'Callaghan. She had but little definite plan as to the requirements of her building. The architect gave it a conventual character and arrangement; but she had merely required large schoolrooms and dormitories, a room that might serve as a chapel, and some accommodation for ladies who might undertake to help in the work which she hoped to found.

Catharine's building was not completed till after three years from its beginning. In the mean time she resided with her married sister, who, as has been already said, had conformed to the Protestantism of her husband, and brought up her children in the same religion. Catharine devoted herself, as usual, to works

of mercy, teaching children in the schools, and visiting the sick. There is a touching story at this part of her life of the care which she lavished upon a poor maniac, who had formerly been in good circumstances. Meanwhile her prayers and silent influence were doing their work. Her sister's health was rapidly failing, and she determined to return to the Church. She managed to remove to Dundrum for change of air, and was there reconciled without her husband's knowledge, exhorting her eldest daughter, who was with her, to follow her example as soon as she could. She soon after died. Catharine continued to live with her brother-in-law, and her niece soon attached herself entirely to her. A chance conversation on the subject of her influence over his children revealed to the father that his wife had died a Catholic. He was in such a paroxysm of fury at the news, that it seems as if her sudden flight from the house alone saved him from killing his sister-in-law in his passion. She continued, however, to reside with him after this, and her niece was ultimately received into the Church, and became one of the earliest postulants of the Order of Mercy.

Meanwhile the building in Baggot-street was nearly completed, and was opened on the Feast of our Lady of Mercy, 1827. The schools were served, and the young women admitted into the House of Mercy, as it was then called, were watched over by pious ladies, who had volunteered to assist Catharine in her good work. Two of them lived in the house. Catharine herself still resided with her brother-in-law. The residents wore a semi-religious dress, and practised many austerities. Gradually other ladies joined in the work

of instruction in the schools, which soon numbered about three hundred children. The inmates of the House of Mercy were not at first occupied during the day within its walls: they went out to work every morning, after prayers and instruction, and returned at night. A few orphans, wholly provided for, lived in the house from the first.

Early in the following year (1829) Dr. M'Auley—Catharine's brother-in-law—died, and she took up her own abode in the house in Baggot-street, accompanied by her niece. Her residence there, where she was at once recognised as a kind of Superior, led to the introduction of a regular *horarium*; and the little company of ladies, who all dressed in the same plain habit, and called each other sister, assumed very much to outward appearance the guise of a religious community. In the course of the summer the chapel was finished, and arranged so as to be opened to the public, as there was then no church in the neighbourhood. A chaplain was appointed, and the confessors came to hear confessions in the chapel. By the middle of 1830 the number of sisters had increased to twelve.

Her biographer now goes on to speak of the difficulties which arose in this semi-religious foundation, and of the opposition and jealousy it engendered. Finally, the Archbishop decided that they must either drop the appearance of nuns, or submit themselves to the realities of rules and vows.

This decision was the real foundation of the

Order of the Sisters of Mercy, and Catharine, with two other ladies, arranged to make their novitiate in the Presentation Convent at George's Hill, while application was made to the Holy See for the faculties necessary for the establishment of the new Order. Her biographer continues :

When we consider that Catharine was at this time fifty-two years of age ; that she had spent the greater part of her life in affluence, and without any other restraint on her inclinations than was imposed by her adopted parents, both devotedly fond of her ; and that since Mr. O'Callaghan's death—eight years before—she had been her own absolute mistress, and recognised, moreover, as a Superior by the ladies whom she had gathered round her, we may be able to some extent to understand how great a trial it would have been to her to become all at once a novice and a subject, if the foundations of spiritual perfection had not already been deeply and securely laid in her heart. The Sisters of Mercy date the beginning of their institute from the day of her profession, December 12th, 1831.

The story of the remaining years of the life of Catharine M'Auley is in a great measure the history of the progress of the Order of which she had, almost unwittingly, become the foundress. There is a wonderful simplicity and absence of design about the gradual growth of an institute which, having first started in 1831, has now, after an existence of thirty-

five years, between 150 and 200 houses in almost every part of the world where the English language is spoken. Its first progress was, of course, in Ireland ; but it soon crossed St. George's Channel (Bermondsey being the first English foundation); and was not long in fixing itself firmly in the United States and the British North-American provinces. It is to be found in California, in Australia, in Brazil, and in New Zealand ; it has confronted, in its mission of mercy, the great scourge of our time, the cholera ; and its habit was seen side by side with that of the children of St. Vincent of Paul in the care of the hospitals in the Crimean war.

Florence Nightingale has borne ample testimony to the wonderful work effected by these very sisters in the terrible barrack of Scutari, and to the untold value of the Rev. Mother of Bermondsey, who was her right hand during all that sad and anxious time.

The first Convent, after that in Baggot-street, was founded at Tullamore in 1836. The same year saw the second foundation at Charleville; Carlow and Cork followed in 1837. Each of these convents became the mother-houses of numerous colonies. Bermondsey—the oldest house in England—was founded from Cork in 1839; some English ladies having passed their novitiate there in order to learn the rules and catch the spirit of the Order. Birmingham—or, as it should now be called, Handsworth—was founded in the same way,

in 1841, from Dublin; several English postulants having been previously trained at Baggot-street. It was the last foundation made by Mother M'Auley herself, as she died a short time after its completion.

Gradually, as occasion arose, one feature after another was added to the original plan of her House of Mercy in Dublin. At first there were no lay-sisters; but, after a short time, she was touched by the needs of the class of young women from which they are recruited; and her convent had every reason to be grateful for their introduction. Then came a call from the populous parish of Kingstown—in great want of the many services which the sisters were rendering in Dublin; and in this way the first branch-house was formed in 1834. It was not till a year later that the formal approval of the new institute was obtained from Rome.

At the time of her death, in 1841, there were but fourteen houses of the Order in existence; and all of these but the two English foundations were in Ireland. She was therefore personally known to almost the whole Order. Her death was not sudden, and she had for some time before, as it seems, been aware of its approach. She had, up to that date, had a great fear of dying, which was now, as is often the case, changed for a most perfect serenity and courage. But her loss was unexpected by her children, who could not persuade themselves that she was in danger. She, in fact, returned from the foundation of the Birmingham Convent, in the autumn of 1841, only to prepare to die.

‘For the last six months,’ writes one of the sisters

present at her death, 'she was herself well aware that she was dying; and since her return from Birmingham she cautiously avoided anything like business. It is only by her acts that we can judge her mind. She was perfectly silent as to what she thought; arranged all her papers about a month or six weeks before, and said to Sister Teresa, on leaving the parlour, "*Now they are ready.*" About four on Thursday she desired the bed to be moved to the centre of the room, saying that she would soon want air. About seven she desired the sisters to be brought to her; said to each one individually what was most suited to her; but her first and last injunction to all was to preserve union and peace with each other; that if they did, they would have great happiness, such as to make them wonder whence it came; told Sister Genevieve particularly (a venerable sister, who entered Baggot-street in 1833 at the advanced age of fifty-three) that she felt exceedingly happy, as if to encourage her to die. She recognised all; told little Sister Mary Camillus (her godchild Teresa) to kiss her and go away, that she would see her again. She sought thus to prevent her from weeping. The Holy Sacrifice was offered in the room at about half-past eight. . . . I think her agony commenced about eleven o'clock. She spoke very little. . . . About five in the evening she asked for the candle to be placed in her hand: we then commenced the last prayers. I repeated one or two that she herself had taught me. She said with energy, "May God bless you!" When we thought the senses were going, and that it might be well to rouse attention by praying a little louder, she said, "No occasion,

my darling, to speak so loud ; I hear distinctly." In this way she continued till ten minutes before eight o'clock, when she calmly breathed her last. I did not think it was possible for human nature to have such self-possession at the awful moment of death.'

Charity was her favourite virtue ; and we are told that, towards the close of her life, she was able to say of her religious sisters, that the sun had never gone down on the anger of any, and that there never had been a breach of charity among them. She could not possibly have said anything more significant of the solid perfection to which she had trained them. She was herself a pattern of condescension and humility. Though the Superior and Mother of all, she did whatever she was asked, as to tell a story or sing in recreation for the amusement of the rest. She seldom reproved severely. Once, after having done so, her conscience smote her with the thought that she had spoken too strongly ; she sent for the sister, and begged her to bring with her all that had been present when the reproof was given, and then, when they were all assembled, knelt down at her feet and asked her forgiveness. She was always perfectly serene and cheerful, even under the gravest external trials ; and when her last surviving niece died, in the middle of one of the convent retreats, she went on attending at all the exercises as if nothing had happened. Never, under any trial or care, did she let a trace of vexation or sadness appear in her countenance or demeanour at the ordinary recreation ; her cheerfulness and winning playfulness were always the same. One so penetrated with charity could not but be deeply grounded in hu-

mility. She thought so little of her own importance in the work of establishing the Order, that at the time when everything was beginning to prosper—after the early difficulties had been overcome—she offered to go and found a community in Nova Scotia, and to remain there herself. Her love of mortification was great ; and her biographer mentions several exercises of that virtue which she habitually practised. Her devotion was deep, tender, and very simple ; her favourite prayers were such as the Litany and Psalter of Jesus, and the Thirty Days' Prayer.

Persons called to works like hers have, to a striking degree, the gift of impressing their own character on those around them, and thus creating in a short time what afterwards becomes a living tradition. In her case, perhaps, the individual character has not so much perpetuated itself as that of the Sister of Mercy—gentle, patient, hard-working, humble, obedient, charitable, and, above all, simple and joyous.

Wherever we have had the pleasure of knowing them—whether in large or small convents, whether popular and successful, or labouring under disappointment and difficulty—the Sisters of Mercy uniformly bear the deeply religious character stamped on them at their beginning, and their demeanour breathes the quiet peace, unaffected charity, and humble simplicity which marks them as the true children of their venerated and beloved foundress.

We can add but little to the true and beautiful picture here drawn of the character of the

Sisters of this Order of Charity. Those who are living in London may have an opportunity of judging of its truth for themselves: whether in the Catholic Hospital of St. Elizabeth, in Great Ormond-street, which takes in chronic and incurable cases of disease as well as little children; or in the crowded alleys of Bermondsey; or, last not least, in the beautiful Convent in Blandford-square, in aid of which this little tale has been written. The works of mercy undertaken in this house are manifold. They not only consist in visits to the sick and suffering poor, or in the education of children, although their really magnificent infant and day schools are said by the Government Inspector to be the best in his district; but they include also a vast establishment for the reception of young girls out of place, who are here received and carefully tended and employed until fresh situations can be found for them. Their laundry-work is beautiful, and they undertake the washing of a large number of families at the West-end, which greatly assists them in carrying on this most useful charity. How much such a home is needed and valued, by this most unprotected and helpless class in London, it needs

no words of mine to point out. I will quote again from the little pamphlet before me some farther particulars of their daily life, only venturing to express my regret, with that of the author, at the fact that 'the sisters have no mercy on themselves;' and frequently die and are worn out before their time by the arduous and incessant nature of their work. One only defect I think exists in their constitutions; and that is, that each community being independent of the other, there is no possible means of giving the sisters rest or change, even by an exchange of work for a time in a different locality, which is often so beneficial to weary and worn toilers of every class. In one diocese this evil has been met by having only one single great convent, and making the rest branch-houses; to which, of course, fresh sisters can be sent from time to time, and a change of place and work provided for others. I earnestly hope that this system may be universally adopted in the Order, and thereby the health and strength of these devoted sisters be preserved.

'A peculiar feature of their institute—which is probably to be accounted for by the derivation of their rule from that of the elder Order

of the Presentation—consists in the amount of what may be called cloister and community duties, which they combine with their active employments. Thus they have to recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin every day, and have other calls on their time of the same kind. In this, as in their longer novitiate, their perpetual vows, their diocesan constitution, and notably in the character of their spiritual exercises, they differ very widely from the Sisters of Charity, with whom they were at one time accused of interfering. Of all religious orders whose members are not only not cloistered by obligation, but may ordinarily spend many hours of the day outside their convent in school-teaching or in visiting the sick, they are probably the most frequently recalled to the choir, and the most abundantly supplied with practices that secure recollection and defend the interior life. They are thus enabled to bear the really hard, and often very thankless, work imposed upon them by their charity.

‘Perhaps the teaching of schools has become more evidently the chief occupation of the sisters; and the changes in the educational system in England, together with the great

demands now made upon the teachers under government inspection, have sometimes exacted from them very great and difficult exertions.'

We will come now to the subject of our story, as related by one of these very Sisters of Mercy. It has been difficult to select, out of the many scenes of suffering and sorrow which daily come before them, one which should be more salient than the rest. But if I were asked what it is that forms the besetting sin of the young people of this generation, my answer would be—*wilfulness*. And so I have chosen a tale which will show the consequences of indulgence in this fault, which threatens to undermine, not only the peace of families, but the principle of authority in our homes, to an extent which can only be measured by comparing the conduct of children in our own day with the age which has preceded us.

In the time of our fathers and mothers, or even in our own childhood and youth, would it ever have occurred to them or to us, systematically to slight and disobey the wishes of our parents? And I do not mean this only with reference to the graver events of life, such as a choice in marriage or the like, but as regards

the little incidents of every day : such as going out alone ; reading such or such a book ; keeping up such or such an acquaintance or correspondence ; wearing such or such a dress ; and so on. I repeat, that in old times the expressed wish of a father or mother on such points was law. We might grumble, or even rebel interiorly, at such a thwarting of our natural inclinations in any particular point. But it never would have occurred to us to do otherwise than *obey*.

Now it appears to me that the very reverse is the fact. It is sufficient for a child to *will* a thing, however imprudent, however dangerous, and the remonstrance, the advice, the entreaty, the tears even, of parents are of no avail. With inexcusable presumption and a contempt for all parental authority, they assert their right and their determination to do as they please. They consider that ‘they know best in all cases :’ that such and such reading cannot hurt *them* ; that they really ‘cannot have their minds fettered by old-world prejudices ;’ in fact, that they *will have their own way*. In one form or another, this insubordination and want of proper reverence and filial respect is seen in every class

of life from the highest to the lowest, and it needs no seer to foretell what is and will be the result on the present generation. Obedience is looked upon (like poverty and chastity) as an obsolete virtue which it is needless to practise; nay, many consider it degrading to the intelligence of this nineteenth century to submit to any command which does not approve itself to their understanding. Just as every kind of Revelation is called in question by very boys or girls, and nothing is believed by them which cannot be proved to be in accordance with human reason. But to come to our story.

In the summer of the year 1850, two ladies, wearing the dress of Sisters of Mercy, might be seen silently threading their way along the crowded pavement of Holborn. Their appearance created little or no surprise, for English people had already become accustomed to the sight, and had learned to respect a costume worn only by those who were engaged in missions of charity and love. The sisters descended the then steep street or hill of Holborn (once the scene of such constant fatal accidents), passed by the gateway of St. Bartholo-

mew's Hospital, crossed a portion of Smithfield, and having escaped the dangers (then almost inevitable) from butchers and bulls, entered a narrow lane, when, by one of those sudden transitions so well known in the City, they found themselves in a locality where silence and peace succeeded to the uproar and struggle through which they had so lately passed, and where even the noise of the traffic of the surrounding streets seemed hushed and still. Such is Charterhouse-square, and such also was this silent and apparently deserted space in the midst of the teeming, crowded metropolis. The shops, mostly occupied by brokers, with their open fronts and white awnings, bore an old-fashioned look of comfort and respectability, in striking contrast to the squalid habitations of the neighbouring streets, out of which an endless succession of dirty half-naked children had been continually pouring. Who does not know the depressing, almost despairing feeling which comes over one in passing through these courts and back streets in London, when one reflects as to what is to become of this vast population, this mass of misery and degradation and dirt and vice, heightened at

the different corners by the glare of the gin-shops, and the wretched objects hanging half-drunk about their doors?

But all this misery had been left behind for the moment by our sisters, who, after carefully referring to a paper containing a variety of different addresses, at last found the one they sought, and entered a house, in the front shop of which a stout elderly woman was standing, complacently surveying her stock of highly-polished furniture and brilliantly-coloured tea-trays. Her face wore a marked expression of kindness and benevolence. If things had gone well with her in this life, she evidently wished to share her good fortune with others, and she greeted the sister's inquiry with a pleasant smile.

'All right, ma'am, you've found the right house. It's Mrs. Howell as you want? Quite right. Ah, poor thing, she's very bad—very bad indeed. She's had her trials, poor soul! and hard ones too—harder than most of us. I am very glad you've come to see her. It'll cheer her up. Upstairs, first-floor front room, ladies. Excuse my not showing you the way, but I can't leave the shop. Please to pass

through the back; for her bed blocks up the door.'

Whilst she was still talking, the sisters had thanked her and passed on, up the steep stairs into a little back room, through which, according to her directions, they prepared to enter the apartment containing the object of their visit. A good deal of antiquated furniture, no longer in use, but betokening better days, was piled up in one corner, so as to occupy the least possible space. A hasty glance into the front room confirmed the conviction that the person they were about to see was not of the poorest class. The mantelpiece was adorned with divers specimens of framed worsted-work, evidently the admired achievements of the poor sufferer when at 'a boarding-school for young ladies.' A few good old religious prints, some valuable though broken china, a small holy-water stoup, and a crucifix completed the adornment of the walls. All bespoke that saddest of all conditions—genteel poverty, or what is more often called 'decayed gentility,' which the French designate by a far more touching and delicate expression, '*les pauvres honteux*.' Is there any capital in Eu-

rope where so much suffering of this sort exists as in London?

On a curtainless but scrupulously clean bed a young woman lay stretched, breathing painfully. The hectic and lustrous eyes told too plainly that consumption had nearly reached the term of its deadly work. She was twenty-three years of age; but the treacherous disease had recalled the bloom of her girlhood, and one would have pronounced her under sixteen, had not the plain gold ring on her thin and wasted third finger proclaimed her to be a wife, though, may be, a deserted one.

An exclamation of pleasure and an ejaculation of thankfulness uttered in a suppressed tone greeted the entrance of the sisters, who, sitting down gently by the bed, and retaining the hand eagerly stretched out to them, commenced a conversation simply intended to give the patient time to recover from the agitation occasioned by their visit.

‘Are you quite alone?’ was the first question.

‘Yes,’ replied the poor girl. ‘I have few visitors; and my mother goes out to work every day at nine o’clock. But our landlady

is very kind. She comes up very often in the day to ask if I do not want something. But my wants are few,' she added after a pause.

'Is your father still alive?'

Her voice trembled as she replied, with evident effort :

'Yes; but at present he has no employment. Still, I hope and trust—'

She stopped suddenly, for the sister had glanced almost unconsciously at her wedding-ring. Their eyes met, and a crimson blush mounted to her forehead. A look of agony passed across her face for a moment, followed by a deadly pallor. That look revealed the cause of all her sorrows, and told in one glance how her marriage was connected with that life's tragedy which was hurrying her to an untimely grave. By degrees the whole of her sad story became revealed to the sisters, partly by herself, partly by those around her; and this melancholy tale I am about to unfold to my readers.

Her real father died when she was about three years old, so that she had no recollection of him; but before she had attained the age of seven, her mother married a second time. No

children were the result of this second union ; so that Mary remained in the same position in which she had been before—the one cherished object in the home. Her step-father could not have treated her with greater tenderness and affection if she had been his own child ; so that the little Mary grew up in an atmosphere of love and happiness, in which her gentle and affectionate nature thrived and prospered. She was naturally religious, and the good example and precepts of her parents strengthened her childish piety. Although, as I have said, in the position of an only child, she was not spoiled : for her mother was a Catholic of the good old school, and enforced obedience as a duty about which there could be no question. After a time she went as a day scholar to a boarding-school in the neighbourhood, where she received what was then considered a good and sensible education for her rank in life.

But her Catechism was learnt at home. It was at her mother's knee that her first prayers were said. And although, as she grew older, she was naturally prepared for the Sacraments by their good parish-priest, yet all the preliminary teaching was given her by her step-father,

who would spend evening after evening when his work was done in explaining to her the mysteries of our holy faith, while she learnt its practice by his own simple and hearty devotion, and by the tender piety of her mother. Would that other parents could thus be induced to take upon themselves this most important duty, instead of leaving it to the chance of an imperfect school-teaching, or the necessarily limited time of an over-worked priest! But to return. Ever since the age of fifteen, her step-father had been employed in a large soda-water manufactory, where by his diligence, honesty, and sobriety, he had attained the post of foreman, and enjoyed the unlimited confidence of his employers. Although in receipt of a good salary, he and his wife lived frugally, not only for the sake of laying by a provision for sickness and old age, but also to be enabled to assist the many cases of distress which came before them, and to take their share in all parochial charities. The numerous workmen employed in the factory were the special objects of the foreman's care and kindness. He would counsel the young, relieve the sick, and watch over them with almost parental care; so

that he was regarded by them all with as much affection as respect, and both husband and wife were looked up to as models of every Christian virtue. But God, who had special designs on these chosen souls, determined to prove them, as He does all His servants, by making them taste of His bitter cross. And this suffering was to be laid upon them by that which they loved and cherished the most in this world—their little Mary. Their union with our Lord was to be still closer; they were to share in His humiliation, in His poverty, in His contempt; so that these very crosses might become their surest passport to a glorious immortality.

Mary was now nearly eighteen. Her beauty had increased with her years; yet had she no taste for any scenes of worldly vanity or pleasure. Perhaps her home was too happy a one to make her seek for enjoyments elsewhere. She had always been treated as the friend and companion of her father and mother, and this intimacy with grown-up people made her rather shy and awkward with girls of her own age. Thus she was freed from many of the temptations to which young people are exposed from the foolish talking and unnecessary confidence

in which they so often delight, and knew as little of the evil going on in the world around her as when she was a child at her mother's knee. Her great delight was to read out loud to her parents in the winter evenings, and sometimes to build castles in the air as to what they should do when her father grew older and resigned his appointment. How they would take a little cottage in the country—that one object of a Londoner's ambition: a cottage covered with honeysuckle and roses and jasmine, and how they would have a cow and real fresh milk, and all the rural delights which Mary had read of in books, and longed to give her parents in their old age. Little did she then fancy that her own pride and obstinacy would blast all these fair prospects, and bring them to the very verge of misery and ruin.

Mary was nearly nineteen when one evening, at a friend's house, she met a young man of about thirty, who had lately come to live in that neighbourhood. He was at once greatly struck with Mary; and she on her side felt an interest in this stranger for which she was at a loss to account. He had travelled a good deal, was a very fair musician, and altogether

appeared in many ways above those with whom she was used to associate. By degrees this stranger, whose name was Howell, became intimate with the foreman's family, and on the plea of being a stranger in London and knowing no one, used to drop in two or three times a week to tea, or walk home with them when they returned from church. He did not appear to pay any particular attention to Mary herself; and yet not a word or a movement on Mary's part escaped him. In proportion, however, as the intimacy increased, a kind of dislike and distrust of him crept into the foreman's heart. He could not account for the feeling, and tried to argue himself out of it; but in vain. Howell felt his increasing coldness; but did not in consequence discontinue his visits. Only he used to time them so as, if possible, to avoid meeting Mary's father. In the mean time, his honeyed words sunk deep into the girl's heart; little things were said which she felt were meant only for her ear; and the consciousness that she was the object of his passion filled her with unspeakable happiness. There is no doubt that, for the time, Howell himself loved this pure child, and was all the more attracted to her by

her innocence and beauty. But with Mary the love was far deeper, and at last took such possession of her heart, that all other things became indifferent to her. Then Howell spoke out, and made a formal proposal for her hand to her step-father. The latter, utterly unprepared for this realisation of his vague fears, flatly refused his consent, forbid him the house, and endeavoured to break off all connection between them. But it was too late. In vain both father and mother represented to Mary their entire ignorance of the young man's family and antecedents; in vain they set before her his poverty and want of means to keep a wife. Mary, with headstrong perversity, would listen to no arguments. Her whole character seemed changed, and her health became so seriously affected that her parents were in despair.

‘He is a *dark* man; I do not understand him,’ exclaimed her step-father one day in his anguish, after repeating to his wife one or two things which he had heard, and which were not to the credit of Mary's lover. ‘Can you do nothing to persuade her to delay, at any rate for a year or two, this imprudent step?’

The poor mother shook her head.

‘I have said all I could,’ she replied sadly; ‘but it is of no use. She will believe that you are prejudiced against him, and that she knows best. Would to God that he had never darkened our doors!’

As they were speaking, Father Penrose, their good old parish-priest, called to see them, and to him the worthy couple poured out their grief and anxiety. He listened gravely, and undertook to reason with Mary, who had gone that evening to see an aunt a few doors off, who was in failing health, and often sent for Mary to cheer and comfort her. Father Penrose knew the hour when she would return, and purposely meeting her, entered at once upon the subject, and endeavoured by every means in his power to shake her resolution. But Mary, though she loved and respected the old priest, who had known her from a child, was, on this point, inexorable. Father Penrose, having tried all that kindness and persuasion could do, at last addressed her sternly as follows :

‘Mary, no blessing can come upon a marriage which has neither the approval of your step-father nor your mother. You may force

them to bend to your will ; but take my word for it that you will repent of it. You, with your childish inexperience, think to know better than those whom God has set in authority over you. Beware lest you add disobedience to obstinacy and pride !'

With these severe words he left her ; and Mary, crying bitterly, was on the point of repenting of the step on which she was so madly bent, when a well-known voice whispered her name, and he, for whom she was prepared to forsake her home and her parents' love—nay more, her own self-respect and peace of mind—suddenly appeared before her.

'What have they been saying to you to make you cry like this ?' he exclaimed fiercely ; for Mary, startled out of all self-control, was now sobbing as if her heart would break.

'Leave me, O, do leave me, Frank !' exclaimed the half-penitent girl, as she endeavoured to withdraw the hand he had clasped in his.

'Not till you promise to be true to me, and to no one else,' retorted Howell.

And—why linger on these moments ? Enough, that Mary returned to her home with

a hard fixed look on her face, such as her mother had never before seen there; and that when she had soon after gone to her own room, the poor broken-hearted woman turned to her husband, with the words, 'O, John, it is of no use; our opposition will only make her sin the more. She *will* have her own way.'

And the foreman, bowing his head on his hands, after a moment's silence, replied, 'Wife, perhaps we have thought too much of our Mary—we have made an idol of her—and God punishes us in this way. May His holy will be done!'

The following weeks were spent in sad preparations on the part of Mary's mother, and in a state of restless feverish excitement by Mary herself, who, though she had extorted a reluctant consent from her parents to her marriage, mainly through her tears and importunity, yet felt that, as the old priest had said, such wilfulness on her part could bring no blessing with it. And at last the wedding-day came, and the solemn service was performed—not by Father Penrose, however, who was not sorry to be from home at the moment. But as

Mary was clasped for the last time in her mother's arms before leaving her old home, a heavy weight fell upon her heart, and a foreboding of misery came over her, which even her husband's caresses failed to charm away.

'What if *I* have been wrong all along, and they were right!' conscience whispered in her heart, followed by the prayer, this time uttered from the very depths of her soul, 'O, my God, forgive me, and grant me grace to fulfil my duties as a wife, for better or for worse.'

And this prayer was heard, though her punishment was swifter and heavier than she had ever dreamed of. But we are anticipating. For the first few weeks, however, the excessive kindness and attention of her husband lulled her apprehensions, and she was able to write happily and even joyously to her parents. Then they settled in a little house on the other side of London; and at first the pleasure of furnishing her new home, and the anxiety she felt to make it bright and pleasant for her husband, absorbed all her thoughts. But soon this content vanished, and gave place to an ever-increasing anxiety and fear. She began to feel the force of her father's oft-repeated words,

‘He is a *dark* man; I do not understand him.’ At first he had come home early to spend his evenings with her, and had gone with her to church on Sundays and festivals. But by degrees he gave up these good habits, and she saw less and less of him. When he did come home, he was moody and taciturn, or else peevish and irritable. He had many acquaintances—respectable in dress, but reckless and dissipated in manner and appearance—who were for ever besetting the door on Sundays. Mary shrank from them with undefined fear and aversion; and her husband never introduced any of them to her, so that she did not even know their names. But he used to join them, and go out with them for hours, never inviting her to be of the party; and from his complete silence afterwards and his evasive answers to all her inquiries, she felt there was something wrong about it all, though *what* she could not imagine. Sometimes he was out half the night, and once or twice returned almost intoxicated. Then he would speak incoherently of coming wealth, or, in his troubled sleep, clench his hands, and mutter, ‘Cursed bad luck!’ Terrified almost out of her wits, poor Mary would

sit up in bed, watching the convulsive workings of his countenance, where exultation, triumph, fury, and despair by turns struggled for the mastery. She did not dare wake him, for on one or two occasions he had silenced her anxious inquiries with an oath. So she watched on, her misery and self-reproach increasing every hour. Was this the man she had loved? Had he in any one way realised her girlish ideal? She did not then guess the secret of his conduct, or imagine for a moment that she had been deluded into a marriage with a professed gambler, and one who was involved likewise in a variety of transactions, none of which could bear the light. Yet so it was; and although she was as yet far from suspecting the truth, she was utterly and entirely miserable.

During these three months, Mary saw little or nothing of her parents, and carefully avoided doing so *alone*. With a bitter sense of self-reproach, she could not conceal from herself that this apparent privation was a positive relief to her; for she felt she could not have concealed or explained away her misgivings, and that the quick eye of a mother would instantly have detected that she was not happy.

So she went on from day to day, fearing she knew not what ; while the man for whom she had sacrificed her parents' happiness and her own became more and more estranged from her, and her ideal vanished so completely, that sometimes she could hardly believe it was only three months ago that she had bound herself for ever to love, reverence, and obey him. Fortunate was it for her that her parents and Father Penrose had laid a good religious foundation in her heart ; for now, in her disappointment and desolation, she knew where to turn and what to do. She could acknowledge that she was justly punished for her wilfulness ; and turning to God with true contrition and humility, beseech Him for strength to bear the heavy cross she had thus laid upon herself. The church was, in fact, her one great consolation ;—she was left for so many hours alone and uncared for !—so there, when the simple duties of her home had been attended to, she would daily resort, and pour out in prayer those unsatisfied longings and that bitter sorrow which as yet she could not bring herself to speak of to any human being. And so, from the very depth of her penitence, she was ac-

quiring that spiritual strength which she would soon so greatly need for heavier trials.

About this time, her husband stated that he had lost his employment; and a situation falling vacant in the soda-water manufactory, Mary's father was induced to recommend him, and easily obtained the appointment from the head of the firm, who trusted implicitly in his foreman's judgment on all such matters. Mary was delighted; partly on account of being so much nearer her old home, and also because she hoped that the change of locality might induce her husband to break off his intimacy with the associates whose influence filled her with such unspeakable dread. In this expectation, however, she was doomed to disappointment, for these evil companions pursued him to their new lodgings. Day by day his conduct became more and more mysterious. He avoided all conversation with his wife when alone, and, in fact, kept as much as possible aloof both from her and from her family. By degrees he perceived her anxiety, which seemed to infuriate him. He gave way to the most fearful bursts of temper, and if she ventured to *look* the inquiry she dared not speak, he re-

pelled her almost savagely. It was impossible to conceal this state of things altogether from her parents; but they, with delicate tact, always avoided anything which might increase her feelings of self-reproach and sorrow. So matters went on for some months, the estrangement between the husband and wife increasing every day, till all hope of happiness died out of Mary's heart, and was replaced by an ever-growing fear of what might some day happen. But the reality far exceeded her utmost apprehensions.

One night her husband came in rather earlier than usual, but he took no notice whatever of Mary, and only appeared more sullen and morose than usual. She offered him a chair near the fire, which he took silently, and sat down without speaking, gloomily gazing into the flames. The silence became oppressive; the clock seemed to tick louder than ever; and when a burning brand fell on the hearth, Mary started so nervously, that she actually dropped her work. Anxiety and sorrow were slowly changing that once bright child, and undermining both her health and spirits. All of a sudden there was a sharp knock at the front door,

and before Mary could rise, the door opened, and a detective in plain clothes appeared on the threshold. Howell started up, cast one look of terror mingled with defiance on the intruder, and then sunk back in his chair, burying his face in his hands, and sobbing like a child. Mary was by his side in a moment, all coldness and unkindness forgotten; she remembered only his old love.

‘Speak, Frank, speak!’ she exclaimed, in an agony of fear. ‘Say that it is all a mistake! He is innocent, sir, he *must* be innocent!’ she added, in a voice of anguish, turning to the police-officer.

The official shook his head, but looked at her with kindly sympathy, while in a few words he explained what had occurred. Howell had been gambling, as usual, and lost heavily. In despair, he had rushed to the factory, and stolen money to a large amount. How he had been able to get at it was yet a mystery; but he had been detected in the very act of leaving the strong-room. The alarm had been given; the missing gold was instantly discovered, and a warrant issued at once for his apprehension.

To all this poor Mary listened as in a

dream. Much as she had dreaded the influence of his evil companions, no thought of guilt or dishonour of this sort had ever crossed her mind. She bent over him in speechless anguish, unable to realise the extent of their misery; while he, in an agony of remorse, uttered a few broken sentences of love and contrition for the way in which he had wrecked her life. The detective, wishing to shorten the scene as much as possible, desired Howell to prepare to accompany him, cautioning Mary to take care what she said, as it might be bad 'for more parties than one.'

It was all over in a few minutes; no sound or cry of resistance had attracted the attention of the other lodgers. Silently Howell followed the policeman; the door closed; Mary listened to the receding footsteps, and then sunk down, alone in her misery and shame.

How long she remained in this kind of stupor she could not recollect. 'O God, my God, support me in this hour!' was her first conscious thought. Then, by degrees, the whole terrible truth came back upon her, and with it the need of some vigorous effort on her part to strive to help her husband in his dire

distress. Her first impulse was to seek counsel and consolation from her parents, and so she put on her bonnet and shawl, and passing hastily through the glaring and crowded streets, reached their house breathless and almost stupefied by the suddenness of the blow. She knocked at the door. 'Is my mother at home?' She was startled at the sound of her own voice; but without waiting for a reply, she rushed past the servant and into the parlour, but stood paralysed at the scene which there met her view. Her mother lay like a corpse in the arms of a woman, who was vainly endeavouring to restore her to consciousness. In answer to Mary's agonising inquiries as to what had caused her fainting-fit, the broken-hearted old servant, who had followed her into the room, broke to her, as gently as she could, that her father had just been apprehended as the accomplice of his son-in-law in the robbery which had been committed, and was accused of having supplied him with duplicate keys of the safe in which the valuable property of the firm was kept, which had been all along intrusted to his care. I may mention in passing that the truth (which was afterwards proved on the

trial, and confessed by the culprit himself) was, that one day the foreman being taken suddenly very ill, Howell had offered to lock-up the office doors, and had taken advantage of the opportunity to obtain patterns of all the keys on the ring, so that for full three months he had had access to all the money in the establishment.

But to return to poor Mary. There are some kinds of sorrow too deep for tears, too overwhelming for words; and such was that meeting between the mother and daughter. When the former at last recovered her consciousness, her first impulse was to clasp poor Mary to her heart, and then, tightly holding her hand, remain motionless. That dreadful night was passed in silent anguish by both; the mother, guiltless of aught but the one weakness of having yielded to her daughter's entreaties, and consented to her luckless marriage; the daughter realising for the first time in all its bitterness the evil which her wilfulness had brought, not only on herself, but on all belonging to her. Yet not a word of reproach passed that poor mother's lips, and her very forbearance added poignancy to Mary's

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sorrow. By dawn the next day both mother and daughter hurried to the police-court, but were not allowed to see the prisoners till the magistrates arrived, when they were summoned to the bar. The accusation was read; the evidence against them seemed overwhelming, and both were committed to Newgate to await their trial. On hearing this, the poor mother fainted away, and had to be removed out of the court. A police-inspector, who had watched them both during the proceedings, and was evidently a kind and benevolent man, laid his hand on Mary's arm as she was about to follow her mother.

‘Are you related to these men?’ he asked, in a compassionate and gentle voice.

‘I am the daughter of the elder and the wife of the younger one,’ murmured the poor broken-hearted girl.

‘Have you any brother or uncle?’ continued the inspector.

‘Neither,’ replied Mary. ‘Whatever is to be done for them must be done by myself. Although appearances are so much against him, I know my father to be incapable of taking a penny from any human being. But how am I

to prove it? O, sir, what *can* I do to save him?' she added, in a voice of agony.

'Has your father any money?' he replied.

'Yes.'

'That's well,' answered the inspector.

And in a few concise words he put her in possession of the routine of our English criminal courts, gave her the name and address of a leading barrister and lawyer, and told her at what hours and where she was likely to find them.

'Keep up your heart, Mrs. Howell,' continued the inspector kindly. 'I know your father by reputation, and believe that there are lots of men who will stand up for him, and not let him suffer for the sins of others. A good character of so many years' standing is not likely to be upset in a day; and you'll see, he'll come well out of this, and stand higher than ever.'

Mary thanked him, with tears in her eyes, and proceeded at once to follow out his instructions. A new sense of strength and power seemed to have come over her; and during the time which elapsed between the arrest and the trial, she was perpetually on

foot, journeying backwards and forwards between Newgate and the inns of court; now in the prison, gathering the most minute details from the captives; now in the ante-room of the lawyer's chambers, amidst a group of equally anxious clients; again, hurrying here and there on messages or business, seeing all her father's old friends and employers, and obtaining warm promises of help from each. On all sides she met with great and unexpected kindness, for every one was interested in the loving anxious daughter, whose one great aim was to save her father's honour; for of her husband's guilt she soon could have no doubt. Far different was the conduct of those two men while undergoing the same imprisonment. Conscious of his own rectitude of mind and purpose, the foreman, though deeply grieved for the shadow that had fallen on his good name, and above all, for the sorrow and shame of his poor wife, was yet sustained by a firm trust in the mercy of God, and a conviction that in due time his innocence would be made clear. The first time that Mary saw him she could only kneel at his feet and implore his pardon in a few broken words.

‘My poor child!’ he exclaimed, ‘you are a far greater sufferer than any of us. Do not let bitter thoughts of the past weigh you down, and remember that everything is ordered for us by One who knows what is for our good. Perhaps I was too proud of my good name,’ he added, with an attempt at a smile, which failed, however, to comfort his penitent child.

As to Howell, his state of mind alternated between sullen despair and maudlin cowardice. No sorrow for his sin was expressed or felt, only fury at being found out, which he vented in bitter words and curses on his hard fate—more painful to Mary to hear than even his abject entreaties to her ‘to save him if she could.’

‘Can this be the man I used to love?’ she often asked herself, after listening to his selfish wailings, and contrasting them with her father’s manly calm and courage. But she kept her feelings in strong check, so that nothing might impair her usefulness or unnerve her for the coming trial.

So the weeks passed on only too quickly. But before the day came, the kind and friendly lawyer who had undertaken the case told Mary

plainly, that while he would leave no stone unturned to clear her father, nothing could be done for her husband. 'His guilt is too evident,' he continued; 'and the only thing you can do is to try and persuade him to act generously, and confess how he became possessed of the duplicate keys. I believe, if he will do this, and throw himself on the mercy of the court, his sentence may be lighter. But you must make him clearly understand that there is no hope whatever of his escaping a richly-deserved punishment.'

Mary undertook the painful errand; and, after a terrible scene, at last persuaded Howell to confess the whole truth—from no feelings of generosity, however, but from the hope, strongly dwelt upon by his unhappy wife, that the confession might mitigate his sentence.

And then the awful day came. Leaning heavily on Mary's arm, the poor mother entered the court, a wreck of her former self, and yet buoyed up a little with the hope, continually whispered to her by sympathising friends, that now the whole truth would be revealed, and the honest foreman cleared. And so it turned out. He of course pleaded not guilty, and one per-

son after another came forward to bear witness to his unimpeachable honesty, his high character, and the universal respect and confidence of his employers. But all doubts on the subject were removed when the second prisoner, Howell, was brought forward, and confessed the way in which he had obtained the false keys which gave him access to the safe. A cheer, which could scarcely be suppressed, was heard in the lower part of the court, which was crowded with the workmen of the soda-water manufactory, all anxious to testify their affection and respect for their old master. One or two of the managers of the firm instantly came forward, and offered to take the foreman back into their service, expressing publicly their regret at having been led for one moment into a belief in any act of treachery on his part.

The judge complimented him on his honourable and upright career, so that his acquittal was a species of triumph almost as trying to bear as his previous unmerited disgrace. As to Howell, his confession, as the lawyer expected, softened the jury towards him, and although he was of course found guilty, his sentence was commuted to fourteen years' transportation.

And Mary? Up to this time, her wonderful energy and spirit had borne her up through all. Though she could neither eat nor drink, and her head was burning, she had kept outwardly calm and collected, gave her evidence clearly and well, and had all along a cheering word for her mother. But when the judge, in a stern and severe voice, turned to her husband and reprimanded him for his disgraceful breach of trust, and the way in which he had allowed an innocent man to be supposed to be an accomplice in his crime, human nature gave way, and Mary was carried home in a state of insensibility. An attack of brain-fever followed. For weeks she hovered between life and death, and the doctors gave little or no hope of her recovery. Her father and mother, who knew her so well, scarcely wished for this state of insensibility to pass away, for she had not heard her husband's sentence, and they dreaded what the effect would be on her proud and sensitive nature of feeling herself a felon's wife. At last reason returned, but with it an overpowering sense of misery and shame. Her husband was gone—that she knew—to work out his sentence; but her father—why was he

always at home, and why did he look so careworn and ill? Bit by bit the truth came out. He had not had the courage to face his old employers, and still less the men under him; besides, in spite of the offer made to him in the court, he knew that his place was filled up, and he did not like to injure his successor. So he had no work, and all his life's savings had gone in that terrible trial. Debt and misery stared them in the face; and Mary felt as if she were the cause of it all. Where were all the old visions of a pretty little country home, and every kind of simple luxury in their old age? By her own wilfulness, all this had been marred and blighted.

As soon as she was sufficiently recovered, they were compelled to leave their comfortable home, and go into smaller and humbler lodgings; but in some respects the change was a relief. The locality was quiet and retired and, comparatively speaking, cheap, and it was far removed from all old associations and friends, from whom she naturally shrank in her present sad position of a 'convict's wife.' But sorrow and humiliation had done their work in that soul, and Mary accepted her daily mortifications

as a just punishment for her past sin. By degrees new friends began to gather round them, touched at the picture presented by that respectable-looking old man, whose story had become known, with his sad and patient-faced wife and fading daughter; for she had never recovered the terrible strain of the few months which preceded the trial, and her health was gradually failing. About this time, the police-inspector, who had so kindly befriended Mary at the time of her father's arrest, heard of a place for the foreman in a soda-water manufactory in the north of England with which his brother was connected, and obtained a promise of the next vacancy for him, so that hope once more brightened the little home. Mary, whose only anxiety in the mean while was to do something for the support of her parents, obtained from their good-natured landlady some employment in French polishing. This kind of work is well paid, and answers far better than needlework; but it gradually undermines the health. Mary obtained at last a permanent engagement in a large establishment at the West-end, and for two years supported her parents entirely. This feeling alone seemed to give her

any consolation ; for the thought of her husband, expiating his sin in a strange land, rarely left her. Much as he had done to wean her affections and lose her respect, she had not ceased to care for him ; and sometimes a hope would arise that he would return an altered man, or that she might go out and join him in Australia, and begin a new life in a new country. But increasing weakness and suffering, which she effectually concealed from her parents for a long while, convinced her after a time that such hopes were vain, and that they would never meet again on this earth. So matters went on till the winter, when one evening, on returning from her work, a violent fit of coughing seized her, in which she broke a blood-vessel, and was so ill that, at first, it was thought she could not recover. She rallied, however, for a time, and resumed her work ; but her cough was incessant, and she felt herself convinced that the hand of death was upon her. About this time Father Ignatius Spencer gave a retreat at Saffron-hill, and Mary determined, if possible, to attend it. It seemed to her as a last grace granted to her by God, to assist her in her preparation for the end, which

she felt could not be long delayed. Two kind and holy women supported her every morning to the chapel, and arranged for her to rest, between the meditations, at a neighbouring house, while they brought her back every evening to her home. Both body and soul seemed to be strengthened and revived by this retreat, at the end of which she made a general confession of her whole life. And so great was her veneration for that holy Passionist, that she would often say, 'she felt sure, if she were in Purgatory, one "Hail Mary" from him would release her.' These words were faithfully reported to Father Spencer after her death, who did not fail to do what she wished.

But the temporary rally she had made that spring did not last. Soon she was compelled to give up her work altogether, and remain in her room; and it was there that the Sisters of Mercy found her. How great was the comfort of their presence those alone can tell who have watched a long and lingering illness, and seen the joy which lights up the dying face at the welcome sight of the loving countenance shaded by the religious dress. I can only speak for myself when I say that the very fact of a

sister being by one's bedside in a moment of almost intolerable pain, seems to take off half its edge. Then they are always at hand to suggest holy and loving thoughts when physical suffering overwhelms for a time the mental peace which the sick person endeavours to maintain. From the very depth of her penitence and the constant sight of the misery her wilfulness had entailed, Mary was perhaps inclined to take too gloomy a view of her own faults; and it was the task of the sisters to cheer that drooping soul; to speak to her incessantly of the love and the mercy of God; to rouse in her heart an increased confidence in the power of the Precious Blood, and to fix her thoughts on the joys in store for those who have suffered in union with their Lord. One evening especially, when the heat of a July sun had been unusually oppressive, and she was struggling for breath in her small and comfortless chamber, the sister gently bent down to her, saying: 'This is Thursday. Remember the Holy Hour.' And instantly the look of intolerable restlessness and pain passed away, and was succeeded by one of marvellous peace. So, gently and tenderly, was this soul prepared for the last great change.

But even earthly consolations were not denied her at the end. One day the sisters came and found her weak and trembling fingers busily engaged on some light needlework, which, with her characteristic energy, she would not leave undone while she had the strength to put in a stitch. It was part of her father's outfit; for at last his faith and patience had been rewarded, and the vacant situation in the north had been offered to him and accepted. 'See how good God has been to me!' she exclaimed, after telling the joyful news to her sympathising listeners. 'I had prayed so hard to Him, that He would not let me die till I had seen my poor father and mother once more comfortably settled. And now He has granted my prayer, and I may sing my *Nunc dimittis*.'

She then proceeded to show all the outfit which her love had prepared for him, and which had only been got together with untold sacrifice and self-denial on her part. Every shilling which had been given her to spend in the little comforts her state so urgently required, had been hoarded up by her for this long-expected situation, when she was determined that her father's appearance should do no discredit to

his kind recommender. 'Only think,' she continued, 'I had enough for everything but one pair of boots, and I could not conceive where that eighteen shillings was to come from. But I set to work and prayed one whole night for it, and the next morning a young priest came to see me, and he actually brought me a sovereign, which he said a gentleman had given him that very day to give to his first sick call!'

'And will your father go *soon* to his new situation?' asked the sister with an anxious look at the emaciated and excited face, over which a cloud passed for a moment at her words.

'Hush! do not speak so loud,' replied poor Mary. 'He *must* go—he ought to go—or perhaps he might lose the place, and that would be worse than all. I try to keep them up by telling them I am a little better; and they do not dream how near the end is!' she added after a pause. There was something so touching and beautiful in this brave girl's determination thus to die alone, sooner than run the risk of again marring her father's prospects, that the sisters felt themselves unable to reply, but only pressed her hand in silence.

A few more days elapsed, and then the hour

of parting came. Mary had kept up wonderfully during all the last sad preparations ; had herself packed her father's trunk, and seen to all the little comforts required by her mother ; and now the cab came to the door which was to take them and their luggage to the station. Mary threw her arms round her father, and as she half knelt at his feet, implored his pardon once again for all the suffering and grief she had occasioned him.

‘ My darling,’ replied her father, ‘ how can you still think of that one fault as needing forgiveness? Have you not atoned for it a thousand times over, by your devotion and by all your dutiful love and care? Where should we have been now but for you?’ And he ended by fairly breaking down while invoking every blessing on his child's head.

Her mother, scarcely less moved, watched her anxiously, saying: ‘ You will spare yourself, Mary, for our sakes, will you not, and come and join us as soon as we are settled?’

Mary's only answer was a fervent kiss as she hurried them into the cab, on the plea that they might miss the train ; but in reality because she felt she could not keep up a moment

longer. Her kind landlady, coming up to see how she was after about a quarter of an hour, found her stretched on the floor in a dead faint, and the blood slowly issuing from her mouth. She lifted her up tenderly and put her to bed ; but from that moment she sank rapidly.

The sisters, coming to see her the following morning, were shocked at the rapid change in her appearance ; but she received them with a smile. ‘ I am quite happy,’ she murmured ; ‘ *my work is done.*’ She then expressed an earnest wish to receive the last Sacraments, and the good priest came. The sisters had arranged a little altar near the bed, and decked it with the freshest flowers. Another kind lady had sent her some candles and a fair white cloth, and so towards evening the sacred rite was administered, and she once more received her Lord in Holy Viaticum. An untold peace seemed to have come over her, in spite of her sufferings, which at times were terrible to witness. On one occasion, when the sisters had said something about praying that she might be released, she answered quickly, ‘ O, no, no : I deserve it all. Only pray that I may be entirely conformed to the will of God, whatever that may

be.' So she went on from day to day, with that wonderful vitality which so often surprises us in those who we feel are doomed to certain death, and who yet linger on, long after both doctors and watchers have given up all hope.

One morning the sisters found her sadder than usual, with an open letter lying on the bed, which was blotted with tears. It was from her father, describing his new home in glowing terms. The situation was all that he could desire; the house they had taken was bright and comfortable; there was a nice little garden. In fact, all that he wanted was his darling little Mary! And in the exuberance of his joy, he added that he was sure she would get quite well and strong in that pure good air, and so implored her to join him as soon as she could. Her mother added her entreaties to those of her father, dwelling on the easy nature of the journey, and saying she would meet her at the station if she would only fix a day for her arrival. We all know how painful it is when we have, as it were, given up life, with its affections and interests, to be suddenly recalled to it again by some unexpected circum-

stance; and to poor Mary's loving heart this fresh reopening of the old wound was inexpressibly trying.

'How miserably weak and foolish I am!' she exclaimed, when the sisters had read the letter, and returned it to her with a compassionate look. 'I thought I had given up everything, and was so resigned to die; and now—'

'Would you really wish, if you had your choice, to be restored to health?' asked the sister gently.

Mary paused for a moment before making a reply. At last she whispered softly:

'No, I do not really think I should; for then I should have a fresh struggle, and a still harder one, to bear.' The sister looked at her inquiringly; and Mary continued, though her breath came in gasps, and she spoke with evident effort: 'I have been thinking a great deal about my poor Frank—my husband, you know—since I have been lying here; and I feel that if I were to recover, my clear duty would be to go to him. In the hour of sorrow and shame, a wife's place is by her husband. And yet, I feel also that it would require more courage than I could possibly muster. I have such a

dread of the sea ; and to leave my parents for ever, if I were still on earth, would be terrible. No, I do not wish to live,' she added, with more energy ; 'that is, unless it be God's holy will, so that I might be more fit to go.'

'You can offer up all your present sufferings for him,' answered the sister. 'Who knows that they may not work out his salvation? God is infinitely good, and will accept all such sacrifices, in union with that of His Divine Son, for the conversion of sinners.'

Mary smiled faintly.

'Will you answer this letter for me?' she continued. 'I fear I could not hold a pen now. But do not say how bad I am. Only that I am afraid I am too weak to come to them.'

The letter was written as guardedly as possible ; but it could not deceive a mother. On the following day the earliest train brought her to her child's bedside. And great was the sisters' joy when, on paying their daily visit, they found she had arrived.

'How can I thank you enough,' exclaimed the poor mother through her tears, as she met them at the door, 'for all the care you have taken of my poor child ! We had no idea she

was so very ill; and she tells me you have been everything to her.'

'It has been a great pleasure to do anything for her,' replied the sisters; 'and it is not often we have so much consolation as in her case. I fear you must have found a great change since you left.'

The mother could not speak, but drew aside the curtain of the little room where Mary lay. Her eyes were closed, and her hands tightly clasped the crucifix she had hung round her neck. In a recess opposite her chair was a little altar, with a superfrontal worked by the sisters, and a beautiful picture of our Lady and the infant Saviour above. Over this the sisters had illuminated the words, *Passio Christi conforta me*. And latterly they had added, at her own earnest request, the words, *Credo, spero, amo*. She was so afraid lest in her weakness she should forget the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and often repeated the word *amo* with a wonderful expression of joy and love. On the poor walls of her little room the sisters had pinned her favourite holy picture-cards, 'La grâce du pauvre malade,' 'The death of St. Joseph,' and others. As they were look-

ing at her, Mary opened her eyes and smiled ; and then, glancing at everything round her, whispered softly :

‘ You see I have everything I want. You have been so good to me. God bless and reward you !’

These were the last words she uttered to the sisters. The following day, when they returned there, they found the blinds drawn down, and the good landlady, through her tears, informed the sisters that all was over. She had died rather suddenly the evening before. Her mother thought her weaker towards nine o’clock, and sent for the priest, who began reciting the prayers for those in their last agony. And when he came to the words, *Subvenite Sancti Dei*, she suddenly looked up with an expression of intense joy, as if she had already a glimpse of the Beatific Vision, and then with a gentle sigh her spirit fled.

‘ The poor mother has gone out to make arrangements for the funeral,’ the landlady added. ‘ Would the sisters come in and see the corpse?’

They entered the little room, where a pious neighbour was quietly praying. Two lighted

tapers were lit at the foot of the bed on which she lay, so calm and beautiful in death, and with a look of wonderful peace and joy on that pure white face and marble brow. For a long while the sisters knelt and prayed in silence, and then the broken-hearted mother came in.

‘O, how shall I break it to her father!’ were her first words, as she sobbingly pressed her lips on her child’s cold forehead.

‘Tell him how blessed her death has been,’ replied the sisters, ‘and he will not wish her back. She has worn the crown of thorns here only that she might inherit a glorious crown in the kingdom of heaven.’

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